



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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May 14, 2003

TO: Don Sloma, Executive Director

FROM: Craig McLaughlin, Senior Health Policy Manager

RE: **FOLLOW UP ON CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS**

Background and Summary

At the March meeting, Board Members David Crump and Dr. Maxine Hayes, sitting in for Secretary Selecky, raised concerns about the preparedness of schools during a health emergency. Dr. Hayes spoke about the experiences of children in the New York City schools on September 11, 2001. Similar concerns also came up during discussions at a Statewide Readiness to Learn conference sponsored by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and attended by Board staff.

Board staff discussed these concerns with employees of OSPI and the Department of Health (DOH). Around the same time, OSPI initiated contacts with DOH and the Emergency Management Division (EMD) of the Military Department. On April 9, staff from OSPI and DOH met to discuss school emergency preparedness. Board staff members were invited to attend but were not present because of an all-day Board meeting.

I spoke about the meeting with John Erickson, director of the DOH Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response, and Laura Blaske, DOH Communication Systems Manager. They informed me that the meeting began with DOH providing a basic orientation on bioterrorism. All schools are already required by statute to prepare emergency response plans. DOH staff reviewed existing planning requirements and recommended that schools continue with their all-hazards approach. They also recommended that local health jurisdictions be the primary point of contact.

Ms. Blaske has been invited to join the OSPI School Safety Committee so that OSPI and DOH will have an ongoing channel for information sharing and materials development. Additionally DOH and EMD had established a partnership to coordinate emergency management publications, including those aimed at children and schools. DOH will be translating EMD materials for kids into other languages, for example, and is helping EMD update and republish a book of fact sheets that will be sent to schools and local health jurisdictions.

Recommended Board Action

None